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MAX WEBER

The development of his rich work comprises the time from about 1910 until 1961 and his share in the most important trends of our time. His ways of seeing and creating range from realism to abstraction. It seems, however, that his most personal abilities revealed themselves purest in the fruitful area that extends between the two poles. On ways of original syntheses we see him at his best.

A picture of 1910 manifests his inclinations almost programmatically. In "Three Figures" nudes show some deviations from anatomy; but the departures confer to them architectonic qualities, or they accentuate natural architecture by strongly vaulted and, as it were, framed surfaces. Some edges even divide the bodies not as Nature does. But its structural principles are preserved, personal work is rather interpretation of objective elements.

That picture was in some degree also a plastic adventure. The underlined architectonic character went along with an emphasis on the third dimension that brought this composition close to the spirit of Sculpture. It ought to be mentioned that the artist did then some experimental sculpture too, but abandoned it soon, seeking to realize even his outspokenly plastic concepts exclusively in painting. Painting, however, at times adopts plasticity, at times it emancipates itself from plastic elements. Remarkable swaying is reflected in "Geranium" (1911, Museum of Modern Art, New York).

Dangerous extremism begins / 1913, with "Women and Tents". Oscillating curves intersect in mainly vertical and slightly diagonal directions; within these sweeping movements details of bodies, heads, / Faces appear. By this far going reduction of reality, however, not all sensuality of the concept vanishes, even some loveliness of details is left.

This way led directly to "Rush Hour" (1915) with its vigorous dynamics and mighty rhythm, an eulogy on New York, reminding subjects in which artists like Walkowitz or Lozowick specialized. Weber combines linear and stereometric exactitude with freely conceived and rather unfinished objects which we ~~we~~ seem to perceive in an intermediate phase of their formation. Goodrich was right to find such concepts nearer to Futurism than to Cubism, since the first tries to fix in the picture changes, time, while the typical deformations of the latter are always static ones.

In the "Chinese Restaurant" (1915, Whitney Museum) Weber draws nearer to statics. This picture is extremely crowded, but as a composition significant thanks to fine correlations between its parts. In two paintings of the Loewenthal Collection, New York (1916 and 1919) a similar degree of deformation is applied. The subject of the first, "Russian Ballet", is in itself dynamic enough. Here impressionistic reminiscences come back, but they are subordinated to the construction. In the second, "Visit", figures are well recognizable, but cruelly operated, by cutting heads, splitting foreheads, cracking faces and prolonging them terribly. The kind of beauty we might still feel in spite of all disfiguration is ~~the~~ that of the remaining elements of form and color; these, however, ceased to be qualities of objects and became almost independent, purely decorative factors.

Weber's works of the next fifteen years deserve the namings of both realism and idealism. They are relatively realistic when seen from the view point of the earlier ones, while their idealism is rather in themselves. They could also be called materialistic, for the treatment is often rough, the artist avoids smoothing and any finishing, thus intensifying our sensitiveness towards his medium. Heavy nudes or dressed figures, appearing in interior or landscape space, seem often to

talk.. Within contrasting colors of still-lives strange independence is conferred to lines. A widely and richly treated Jewish subject, "Thora Learning" (1934, Jewish Museum, New York), sums all this up.

Another Jewish motif, "Synagogue" initiates a new series. Here nightmare figures, crooked, wry-necked, seat, and stand on unbelievable thin and bandy legs, and their doll heads could make us both laugh and weep. We appreciate the opinion of St. S. Keyser who finds it necessary to defend the artist against the reproach that of these parts of us he made caricatures. However, after having revised our views on caricature, and trying to understand its psychological and sociological function (p.) we would not blame the artist if he would have done it. Is a similar approach of Soutine, in spite of its relatively moderate look, not deeper frightening than that of Weber? In a history of caricature in our sense both of them would certainly deserve honored places. Here and there any classic perfection is fought and expelled. In "Synagogue" one detail is most characteristic of this tendency. The vaulting of this building interior is left fragmentary; as if completeness would have made it too classic, too normal, too satisfactory. Nevertheless, he makes of it no mannerism. Above an awful aspect of "Dancing Chassidim" (1940, Loewenthal) with their horrible cylinder hats and their stubborn joy excess the dome is more or less finished again.

Now nightmares get another sense, as if they had not more time enough to pass through all the labyrinth of inner experience when coming from the outer world. Refugees appear. Three women drag on their backs their last property. The land around is sad or dead. These reflexes of the Inferno make the Irreal in different realities better understandable. Four figures in "Prayer at Moonlight" (1944, Whitney Museum) become

rather sticks or strings. Olive greens, lemon yellows, blood reds and icy blues are their weird accompanists. At the same time the theme of "Visit" reappears, ^{though} not for the sake of new solutions of form problems. Here we shudder at a unique exaggeration of features ^e of the Jewish race, a dreadful hallucinatory assembly of prototypes. ~~ghostlyxxxxxxxxxxxx~~

In some pictures the artist still seems to calm himself and sets our mind at rest too ("The Reader", 1942, Zagsyski Collection, New York). But his negation of the body and tremendous whirls of lines continue in compositions like "The Acrobats" (1946) and in several still-lives. (1946) At the "Bathers" and the "Three Fathers" (1948) almost nothing but coils of ^t strokes are left.

A centuating of musical themes in his last years reminds us that in his youth Weber was a musician and singer too. Therefore "Each Orchestra" ^{might be more} (1954), e. g., ~~than~~ the glaring reflex of a visual impression that also a deaf painter could have had. We could explain it as a pictorial translation of musical motifs, or as a bold attempt for it.

Max Weber was born 1881 in a chassidic family of Bialystock, his father was a little taylor. When Max was ten they immigrated into America and settled in Brooklyn. 1898 he was admitted at the Pratt Institute to study there art and carpentry. From 1901 to 1905 he taught ~~at the~~ in Lynchburg, Va., and Dallas, Tex. For his savings he went to Paris, attended the Julian Academy, Colarossi and the Grande Chaumiere Academy, got stimulation by personal contact with Matisse and Picasso, and Henri Rousseau distinguished the young artist by his friendship. With little money he made trips to Spain, Italy, Belgium and Holland. After a short stay in London he returned to New York, and didn't leave it anymore.

His first exhibits there (1909, 1911, 1912) found little understanding.

1913 he took part in a progressive group show in London and had a one
man's show in the ^{Newark} Museum. 1914 a book of his poems appeared in
London. 1915 the public reacted on his exhibits. Friendlier. At the White School
of Photography he taught Practical Aesthetics, and 1916 his lectures were
printed as "Essays on Art". In that year he founded a family. 1924 Bernheim Jeune
showed in Paris one exhibit of his works, while J.B. Neumann exhibited him in
New York six times until 1937. Exhibitions at the modern museums of New York,
Baltimore and the Whitney Museum followed. The Jewish Museum of New York
celebrated his 75th birthday by a retrospective of his oils, gouaches,
pastels, ~~drawings~~ ^{drawings}, woodcuts
and lithographs.

1930 the Downtown Gallery, New York, had 1930 published a M.W. monography.
Catalogue of the
To the mentioned ^{at} the Whitney Museum Lloyd Goodrich wrote the preface,
and Rosalinde Irvine contributed a selected bibliography of astonishing length.-
The preface to the catalogue of the retrospective that took place at the Jewish
Museum in New York is by St.S. Keyser.

In spite of all recognition he was not able to make a living of
his artistic work before his 60th year of life. His death in September 1961
brought new impetus to his app^eciation.

It was a life rich in changes. But they came doubtless out of his
depths, all of them were he.

(IAB)

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Max Weber

2 items

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